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## Viewing cable 06CAIRO5298, EGYPTIAN PARLIAMENTARY DYNAMICS: DEBATE SHIFTS,

If you are new to these pages, please read an introduction on the [structure of a cable](#) as well as how to [discuss them](#) with others. See also the [FAQs](#)

### Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

### Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#06CAIRO5298**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06CAIRO5298	2006-08-24 08:44	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Cairo

Appears in these articles:

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INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 005298

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

NSC FOR RICK WATERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/21/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN PARLIAMENTARY DYNAMICS: DEBATE SHIFTS,  
BUT END RESULTS REMAIN UNCHANGED

REF: A. CAIRO 4335

[1](#)B. CAIRO 3993

Classified By: DCM Stuart Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The current Egyptian parliament, populated by a majority of National Democratic Party (NDP) members and an energized Islamist minority, contains more opposition parliamentarians than any previous People's Assembly in Egyptian republican history. The presence of an activist and disciplined bloc of Muslim Brotherhood (MB) MP's has had a pronounced influence on the tone and tenor of the assembly's debate. Many observers see a "positive shift" in parliamentary dynamics. An ambitious agenda for the coming parliamentary session is set to be unveiled at the upcoming NDP party conference, and it is anticipated that when the People's Assembly reconvenes, numerous contentious constitutional amendments will be debated, as will a new

Anti-Terror Law. The NDP's majority firmly controlled the 2005-2006 legislative process, and the same can be expected when the 2006-2007 session opens in November. Although we anticipate many stormy parliamentary debates in the coming session, in the final analysis, the NDP's legislative agenda will win. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) The current Egyptian parliament, populated by a majority of NDP members and an energized Islamist minority, contains more opposition parliamentarians than any previous People's Assembly in Egyptian republican history. The NDP's majority of 332 MPs (out of 454 seats) put it in firm control of the legislative process during the 2005-2006 session, and the same can be expected when the 2006-2007 session opens in November. However, the presence of an activist 88-seat bloc of MB MP's, often joined in voting by the few leftist opposition parliamentarians (8 seats) and various independents (14 seats), has had a pronounced influence on the tone and tenor of the assembly's debate (Note: 12 other parliamentary seats are currently unfilled, because of cancellation of election results from six constituencies due to balloting irregularities. End note).

¶3. (C) Observers from across the political spectrum agree that there has been a "positive shift" in parliamentary dynamics, as the legislative body engaged in more substantive debate than in the past. However, all of our interlocutors noted that the NDP's still dominant majority guarantees them final legislative victory. Although Egypt's legislative body now has a louder bark, it is still toothless when it comes to balancing the overwhelming power of the executive branch.

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OBSERVERS ACROSS THE SPECTRUM AGREE PARLIAMENTARY DYNAMICS  
HAVE CHANGED  
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¶4. (C) In an August 17 meeting, Mohamed Kamal (key Gamal Mubarak advisor, influential member of the NDP Policies Secretariat, and professor of political science at Cairo University) noted that paradoxically, the presence of the large MB parliamentary bloc has had a "positive" influence on the NDP. He opined, "we have had to become more disciplined as a party," stating that unlike previous parliamentary sessions, briefings are now held for NDP parliamentarians at NDP HQ prior to new laws being introduced, so that they can be fully apprised of the NDP position. Kamal observed that the "level of debate in Parliament has become more substantive and serious." He also expressed admiration for the MB's "party discipline," noting that when parliamentarians filed their responses to the presidential questionnaire on constitutional amendments (ref A), every MB MP filed "the exact same response, to the letter!" Other observers have also commented to us on the MB's high level of organization in preparing for parliamentary activity; we have heard unconfirmed reports that when Parliament is in session, all of the MB MP's, even those from Cairo, stay in the same hotel in the Cairene suburbs, as a sort of team-building exercise.

¶5. (C) Al Ahram Weekly's long-time parliamentary correspondent, Gamal Essam El-Din, told poloff on August 20 that he had observed "significant shifts" during the last session of the assembly. Overall, he felt that the body has assumed more importance and stature in Egyptian politics, noting that when he first started working at Parliament in 1992, there were only 20 journalists covering the assembly, compared with 150 today. Essam El-Din summed up the major substantive changes as (1) an increased parliamentary focus on regional and Arab affairs (citing the unprecedented separate parliamentary meetings on Iraq, Palestine, and Lebanon held at the MB's urging); (2) increased assertiveness of the parliamentary oversight role (noting in particular the focus of MB MP's on privatization issues regarding the Bank of Alexandria and the Omar Effendi retail chain), and; (3) the "virtual disappearance of taboo topics," as MB and leftist MP's try to "outdo" each other in the eyes of the public.

16. (C) Procedurally, Essam El-Din said that due to the rigorous attendance of all MB MP's, NDP MP's have had to curb their absenteeism, and "actually show up, unlike in the past, so that the MB doesn't win parliamentary votes." (Note: Parliamentary votes can be held, no matter how many delegates are absent. End note). Like Kamal, he characterized the MB bloc as "extremely disciplined," as contrasted with "overall lazy NDP parliamentarians, who face divisions within their own ranks." Essam El-Din noted that the NDP currently lacks a strong parliamentary "whip" to keep MP's in line, which has resulted in embarrassments such as two NDP MP's interrupting Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif's speech during the final session of parliament on July 12, yelling that Nazif's statements are "usually fabrications." However, despite such occasional rhetorical outbursts, NDP MP's very rarely go against the party line when it comes to actual voting. Essam El-Din described Saad al-Katatni, the leader of the MB bloc, as a "moderate" who works to "rein in" some of the more fiery MB parliamentarians.

17. (C) Political analyst Amr Choubaki of the Al Ahram Center for Strategic Studies, commented to poloff on August 17 that "the MB is making the NDP parliamentarians actually do their homework ... Parliament is becoming a more serious body ... because of the presence of the MB bloc, the NDP must take the assembly as a whole more seriously." Like others, he mentioned that NDP parliamentarians are now having to attend parliamentary sessions, to ensure an NDP majority when votes occur, citing an instance when the NDP did not have enough NDP's in attendance, and Fathy Sarour thus had to call a re-vote. Choubaki was also impressed with the MB parliamentarians' discipline, and noted that "they all take their role very seriously, and are very professional, unlike many of their NDP colleagues."

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FORMAL NDP REVIEW OF 2005-06 PARLIAMENTARY SESSION ...  
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18. (SBU) At the close of the 2005-2006 parliamentary session, Speaker of the People's Assembly Fathy Sorour released a 73-page statement warmly praising the Parliament's performance during the previous term, particularly the manner in which MP's of different political affiliations "exercised their legislative and supervisory roles during a time of international and domestic tribulations." The report states, "In the new Assembly the number of the ruling NDP MP's decreased by 20 percent (from 88.5 percent to 68.5 percent), while the proportion of opposition and independent MP's increased from nearly 10 to 31.5 percent," which resulted in, "...the opposition (being) vociferous and effective." Sorour's report highlighted that in the 2005-2006 session, Parliament held 121 general sessions, for a total of 557 hours and 54 minutes (the lengthiest record in Egypt's parliamentary history), and 1149 committee and joint committee meetings. According to the report, the Assembly passed 33 overall laws, 113 financial and budgetary laws, had 94 motions for draft laws, reviewed 54 treaties, and ratified 1 presidential decree.

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... AND THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD'S ASSESSMENT  
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19. (C) In mid-August, the MB website issued a 13-page report entitled "Summary of MB Performance in Egyptian Parliament Since 2005." The report complained that the NDP used it's majority to marginalize opposition and MB parliamentarians for committee assignments, but goes on to outline an extraordinary range of MB bloc activities. The report also "classifies" the various members of the MB bloc as follows: 14 general managers and chiefs of sectors, 10 accountants, 9 teachers, 8 professors, 7 technical specialists, 6 lawyers, 6 physicians, 6 employees, 5 engineers, 4 businessmen, 4 pharmacists, 3 agronomists, 3 Azhari scholars, 2 veterinarians, and 1 journalist.

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COMMENT  
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¶10. (C) Despite outspoken criticism during debate on some key legislative issues (new judiciary law, new press law, extension of the Emergency Law) during the 2005-2006 parliamentary session, opposition efforts largely did not affect final passage of legislation. One prime example of this is the walk-out from Parliament of 100 opposition MP's to protest the draft judiciary law. The law was passed unchanged (ref B). An ambitious agenda for the coming parliamentary session will be unveiled at the NDP party conference beginning September 19. When the People's Assembly reconvenes in November, numerous contentious constitutional amendments will likely be debated, as will a new Anti-Terror Law (to replace the current Emergency Law). While we can expect many stormy parliamentary debates in the 2006-2007 session, in the end, the NDP's legislative agenda will be successful.

RICCIARDONE